

Thirty years ago, during an unprecedented national energy crisis, President Carter said: “With the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes.” Because our nation has too often failed to make the hard decisions needed to move toward energy independence, President Carter’s admonition is as relevant today as it was back then. We simply cannot ignore our addiction to foreign sources of oil any longer.

That is why this week I am going to reintroduce, with the support of 100 of my Congressional colleagues, a comprehensive package of measures that represents a major national effort to make substantial gains in technology, conservation and vehicle efficiency, and the use of alternative fuels. This legislation, named the Program for Energy Security (PROGRESS) Act is meant to initiate a robust national program – akin to the Manhattan Project on energy independence - that brings government, business, and the science and environmental communities to the table to promote and expand alternative energy sources and make more efficient vehicles that burn cleaner fuels.

First, it would establish a bipartisan National Energy Security Commission, bringing together government, industry and academic leaders to develop consensus national goals on energy – which Congress must act upon under expedited rules.

Second, it would establish a new Center for High Efficiency Vehicles, seeking to double the average vehicle efficiency and to diversify fuel types. Third, this bill would establish a National Biofuels Infrastructure Development Program, providing

grants to encourage the private sector to invest in wholesale and retail biofuel pumps, tanks and related distribution equipment.

Fourth, it calls for a stimulus package to upgrade the “pipeline” for biofuels – the freight rail system- while also providing grants to promote conservation alternatives such as public transit and commuter rail.

And fifth, this bill would ensures federal government leadership in the use of the alternatives to oil by increasing the use of alternative fuels in federal and state fleets, developing biofuel plants in every region of the country and speeding development of standards that are needed to promote

alternative fuels use.

I believe the PROGRESS Act is vital to our economic and national security and to keeping our nation and the State of Maryland strong, stable, and secure into the future. The legislation, which would bring together government, industry and academic leaders to develop national energy goals, stands to compliment and promote several important Maryland energy initiatives, with potential investments in energy infrastructure, research and development, and alternative

energy production.

For example, both the Maryland State Senate and Assembly voted recently to tighten car emissions rules by requiring manufacturers to sell more fuel-efficient vehicles that produce fewer carbon dioxide emissions. My legislation would create investments in federal science and technology that could help the auto companies meet those goals.

One of the major focuses of

the PROGRESS Act is a significant investment in biofuels infrastructure in order to make ethanol and other alternative fuels more available to consumers driving flex cars and hybrid vehicles. Such efforts would work to avoid distribution problems, such as those that occurred last year when there was a switch to “summer blend” fuel in the Mid-Atlantic region, the result

of which contributed to higher gas prices. The legislation also stands to benefit Maryland's agriculture industry by dovetailing with efforts in the state to promote cellulosic ethanol production .

By establishing a nationwide commitment to energy independence, the

PROGRESS Act will work to achieve greater stability in energy and fuel prices in the long-term by diversifying the market to include alternative energy sources and by developing more energy efficient and environmentally friendly technologies. A diversified fuel market that includes greater shares of clean alternative energies and reduces America's dependence on foreign oil

would have widespread benefits to the economy, to the environment and to national security.

The issue of energy independence is far too important to the future of our children and our nation. This was the case when I first introduced this legislation last year and it remains so today. What has changed, however, is the balance of power of in



Congress, which now rests with a majority that is serious about fostering a safer, cleaner, and more prosperous America by reducing our dependence on foreign oil. It is past due time to achieve real progress for America. I hope to work with my colleagues in the Congress as well as with President Bush to pass this critical

legislation and take action once and for all to achieve energy independence that strengthens our national security, boosts our economy, creates more jobs and protects our environment for future generations. For more information on the PROGRESS Act, please visit:

<http://www.majorityleader.gov/docuploads/progressactonepager.pdf>